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ISRAEL IN HOSEA.

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In the prophetical writings we have a reflected image of the times of the respective prophets. What is the picture of Israel reflected in the book of Hosea? To answer this question will be the aim of this paper.

The first part of Hosea, chapters I-III, forms a single production complete in itself, a poem, a sermon. It has an introduction and conclusion, an account of what is generally supposed to be a portion of Hosea's private history. The main part, chapter II is introduced and connected with the preceding by a promise which is practically the text of the sermon. In chapter I we have Israel in her sins represented by a harlot surrounded by her illegitimate children. She becomes Hosea's wife and as such bears him children to whom are given symbolical names at the command of Jehovah. These successive children represent the successive steps of God's primitive dealings with Israel. God will destroy the house of Jehu, he will withdraw his mercy from his people, and at last cast them off entirely. This picture of punishment for Israel is set off by a background of mercy and prosperity for Judah.

In chapter II we have a picture of Israel in her changing fortunes without symbol though with imagery taken from the symbols of chapter I. We have Israel in her sins sorrounded by plenty, but taking the silver and gold which the Lord had given her and making of them false gods. She bows before these in thankfulness for the gifts of wine and oil which in her perverse forgetfulness and base ingratitude she claims that they have given her. We then have a picture of her punishment. God hedges up all her ways. He makes it impossible for her to bow down to her false gods. All her plenty is turned into want. Then God comes and taking her by the hand leads her out of the city, away from the habita-

tions of men—out into the wilderness. Then he sits down beside her and with nothing to distract her thoughts, nothing to lead her away, God her lover whispers to her once more of his love. We can picture the scene to ourselves. The features of the wayward woman, stamped with the mark of her sin, bears at first a defiant look, but as her divine lover pleads the defiance gives place to contrition and the tears begin to course down her cheeks. Finally through the tears the light shines. She turns and extending both hands exclaims, My husband! shuddering to use the ancient word of love My Lord, because of its present sinful associations. She now receives her reward. Her troubles issue into new blessings. She receives back her ancient vineyards and olive orchards. The blessings of the new covenant extend to nature. The wild beasts forget their fierceness and the earth is wonderful in her productiveness. The names of the children are changed. Jezreel becomes the symbol of productiveness. Lo-ruhamah becomes Mercy and Lo-ammi becomes My people.

In the third chapter we have the dwelling in the wilderness represented by the adulteress, whom Hosea brings back, remaining in retirement and the return is represented as a return to David's house as well as to Jehovah.

We naturally ask the question from the standpoint of what period in Israel's history is the view taken. It would seem from the references to Jeroboam, that the view point was at the time of his reign. It would hardly seem that this division of Hosea would be so silent in regard to the great sins which form the burden of the prophet's words from v. 8 on, if it was written after these occurrences. Nor is there in this division any suspicion of Judah's fall which is hinted at in the very first discourse of the second part. As we shall see this first section of the second part seems to fall within the reign of Jeroboam. So this first division must fall earlier than the last of the reign of the King.

We come now to the second part of Hosea. Here we find ourselves in a very different atmosphere. The first part is one connected whole, the second part is made up of several distinct discourses. In the first part the eye of the prophet

sweeps over a wide extent of history—in the second part the view is narrowed, contracted though never intense. In the first part the prophet looks far into the future. In the second part, with few exceptions, he looks only at the things just in front. In the first part the man of God seems to be sitting in some lofty retreat away from the turmoil of life, from which height he looks down upon his people and, seeing their condition and their end, throws his thoughts into poetic form and bids his followers plead with their mother Israel. In the second part he leaves his retreat, lays aside his garments, buckles on his armor and himself enters the conflict, himself, pleads with Israel. Hence while the first part is orderly, logical, the second is abrupt and unordered—the fiery torrent pouring forth from the heart does not give thought time to crystallize into symmetrical form. However, by classifying the different statements and putting them in their logical connection, we have remarkably vivid pictures. The first part is beautiful, the second is strong. The first gives us a figurative idea of the condition of Israel, the second gives us the actual. As Hosea comes into personal contact with Israel we behold what an Israel it was. Hence we must rely mainly on the second part of the book for our picture of the condition of Israel.

The first discourse is 4: 1-5: 7.

We notice here first a general enumeration of the sins of Israel. No piety, no truth, or loving-kindness or knowledge of God. There is lawlessness, lies, killing, stealing—adultery, rulers are a snare for the subjects, priests connive at the sins of the people. But in the matter of worship the picture is more full. They have turned to idolatry. At the great religious centers are found the bull deities, the calves of Jeroboam, before which the sacrificers bow, though still worshipping Jehovah. But a still grosser idolatry exists everywhere. Upon all the high places and under all the green trees they sacrifice and burn incense and sell their virtue in the name of religion. The prophet looking over the land beholds the smoke of sacrifice rising from every hill-top, and the green trees scattered over the landscape become but ensigns of the licentious worship committed in the goodly

shade beneath. As a result, adultery and harlotry are rife throughout the land.

We turn now to a different picture, a picture of punishment, of retribution. God inflicts the greatest punishment he can, he leaves their sins unpunished. "I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom nor your brides when they commit adultery. The sin shall be its own punishment. They "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness." They come with their herds and flocks to seek his face; but they hear no voice, no judgment comes. God has hidden himself, he leaves them to their own devices. Then we have a picture of the immediate future. The pride of Israel shall fall, her glory shall pass away and be turned into shame. The land shall mourn. The inhabitants with the beast and bird and fish shall all languish. They shall eat of their unlawful sacrifices but they shall not be satisfied and their widespread prostitution shall result in no increase of population.

Such is the picture of Israel in these verses. To what period in the history of the nation does this description fit? Hosea prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, beginning with Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Where in this long period was the state of affairs described in 4:1-5:7 found? We unhesitatingly answer, during the reign of Jeroboam. We have in these verses a picture of a godless prosperity. There are wine and flocks and herds seemingly in abundance. No such luxuriant development of local sacrifices could be sustained without a certain amount of wealth. Then we have the picture of impending (not present) destruction—a picture of want. We have also the statement about Judah, suggesting that she was just beginning to incline in the way of Israel calling forth first a warning from the prophet and then threatening punishment. Jeroboam's reign according to the historical books was certainly one of great temporal prosperity but of as great sin, followed immediately by trouble and anarchy.

In no subsequent time in the history of the ten tribes do we again find such prosperity.

We come now to the second discourse of the second part, 5: 8—7: 16.

We have here a marked change in the condition of things. The preceding discourse concerned the nation of the chosen people exclusively. In this discourse appears the name ASSYRIA and the burden of the prophet is Israel's relations with the foreign powers. In this section Judah is equally in the wrong with the Ten Tribes; while in the preceding section there seemed to be only the shadow of the coming sin.

There are scattered throughout this section references to various sins—sins of the same nature as those in the preceding section—the formal worship, sacrifice without loving-kindness, and burnt offering without knowledge of God. There is the same lawlessness and shedding of blood. The nation is bent on evil, a great smouldering furnace ready to burst forth in deeds of wickedness at every opportunity. The leaders still share in the sins of the people. The king and princes delight in the wickedness of their subjects and priests turn banditti.

But there are a few pictures characteristic of this section which command a more extended notice. All through the section there seems to be an ever present undertone of reproach because of the failure of some recent attempt on God's part at reformation. This attempt was fruitless, except to show the depth of Israel's sin. "In my returning the captivity of my people, in my healing Israel," only the iniquity of Ephraim and the sins of Samaria are revealed. "I would have redeemed them, I would have taught and strengthened their arm, but they spake lies concerning me and devised evil against me." In the vividness of the prophet we seem to stand amid those scenes of attempted reform and hear the expostulations of those who yielded to the efforts of the Lord and sought to influence Israel. "Come and let us return unto the Lord . . . he hath torn and he will heal. Let us make the knowledge of God our pursuit." But this is followed by the sad complaint of Jehovah, "Thy loving-kindness is like the morning cloud, like the dew that passes

early away." The efforts at reformation are ineffectual, even the repentance of the few seems to be spasmodic.

Widely differing from the prosperity of the preceding section we find here a picture which reveals a sad condition of affairs. We have here a general state of distress, of national sickness and decay. Their prosperity is gone. The civil and the religious, the state and the church seem to have fallen into decay. "All their kings are fallen. The priests have left the altar, which no longer supports them, to gain a living by highway robbery.* God has been a moth and rottenness to Ephraim and Judah. He has poured out his wrath like water. His judgments have been as widespread and manifest as the light. He has hewed them by the prophets and slain them by the word of his mouth. Judah and Israel are like men on whose head are strewn the gray hairs of old age and decay. They are a prey to others and their strength is devoured by strangers."

Such is the state of affairs outwardly; but there is a still sadder picture. In all this distress there are, comparatively speaking, none that call upon God. They roll in their beds and howl in despair and anguish at the troubles which are come upon them. But amid all their complaining no heart is humbled, no voice calls upon God for help. They rise from their beds not that they may make atonement for their sins but that they may implore the aid of Egypt and Assyria. These mighty powers, to the north and south, form a great temptation, and the chosen people flee to them for help as a silly dove flies to the trap set for its capture. They should have trusted to their God; but instead they turn to the arm of flesh. This is the great sin of this section of Hosea. The same is the sin so often rebuked by later prophets. They go to these nations for help only to make their condition worse. Like Jonah they flee from Jehovah's hand at home only to find his presence following them as they flee. As they hurry along the road to Assyria and Egypt they find God like a lion crouching by the way and springing upon them from his ambush. They find their path spread with

* This is by no means a necessary inference from the statement of Hosea, but is certainly a possible one.

nets set by their God which shall catch them. The silly dove has hastened to its trap. An ancient example of the too common foolishness of forsaking the frying-pan for the fire.

Such is the picture of this section. What is its date? Can we place our finger on any place in the history of God's people and say here stood Hosea in writing these chapters? There are a number of things to help us in determining the date of the view point. We have a few prominent statements. God has tried to reform Israel. The nation is in a deplorable condition. Assyria is appealed to. Especially noteworthy is the fact that Judah is everywhere coupled with Israel and they are in the same condition. They do the same things and suffer the same penalties. This does not necessarily imply that they were confederate. We are told in the historical books that during Jeroboam's reign God sent Israel a saviour and restored their borders. Is it to this that the expressions implying an attempted reform refer? The expression about kings being fallen may refer to the few short reigns after the death of Jeroboam. Notice that the wretched condition of Israel in this section is the fulfillment of the prophecy of the preceding section. There the pride of Israel shall testify, here it has.* There we have amid prosperity a prophecy of coming affliction, here the affliction is realized. Of what brought about this change we have but a single hint. *Strangers* devour their substance. Yet these can hardly be Egypt or Assyria. These nations are only just being called in. The position of the towns mentioned in 5: 8 would not favor an attack from either of these nations. The dangers along the road to Assyria and Egypt are still mysterious, figurative, prophetic, future. We are not told the color of the lion lurking in the way nor whose hand it is that is to spring the snare. These strangers seem almost certainly to be the surrounding tribes, Moab, Edom, Tyre, etc.

Here then is the picture. Israel and Judah reduced to a low condition by the surrounding tribes appealing to the great powers, Assyria and Egypt, for help. When was this? We turn to the historical books. We there find descriptions

* In both cases the Hebrew is the same. It is from the context that I assign a future view in one case and a present (past) in the other.

wonderfully coinciding with this picture, particularly so in the case of Ahaz (see Chronicles), quite so in the case of Menahem, and we may almost say in the case of no other kings. Menahem does not come as far after Jeroboam to preclude references to an attempted reform in Jeroboam's reign being made in his reign. But our usual chronologies put the reigns of Menahem and Ahaz far apart. We may make two statements in regard to this. 'The histories may be silent concerning important events in the history of one or the other of these two nations or of both when both were seeking foreign help at the same time, it being mentioned in the case of only one, or passed over wholly in silence. An explanation, however, for some reasons more satisfactory, is that these two kings, Ahaz and Menahem, were more nearly contemporaneous than we suppose, and there must be a crowding together of the reigns of this period.* The latter position is strengthened by the Assyrian inscriptions. We find both Menahem and Ahaz mentioned by Tiglath-Pileser within a very few years of each other. It is true that Tiglath-Pileser interfered in the affairs of Israel in the time of Pekah; but this was the captivity of Galilee. According to the theory of this paper Assyria had not yet begun to afflict Israel at this time, a position strengthened by the mention of Gilead as still an Israelitish city.

We come now to the third section of the second part of Hosea, chapters 8-11.

This section is divided into two sub-divisions by the style. The first, 8: 1-9: 9, is a series of alternate statements of sin and of punishment without much apparent order. The second part, 9: 10-11: 11, is a series of paragraphs each introduced by a reference to the past history of Israel and all mainly referring to the punishment of God's people. We have here another advance in the condition of Israel. Here we have for the first time the idea of EXILE. The section opens with an invader. The thought soon passes to a carrying away into captivity and then to a terrible destruction, closing with a promised return. The references to Judah are

* It is entirely possible the crowding together was done wholly in the prophet's mind.

slight, but the southern kingdom seems to share in the condition of the northern.

The list of sins in this passage is a long one. There are many old ones and many that are new. Every corn floor is occupied with their religious rites. They are covenant-breakers, false swearers. The corrupters have gone deep. They still call upon God though not worshipping Him in truth. The law of God has been to them a strange thing. They have not sown righteousness and loving-kindness, but wickedness.* Their silver and gold they have made into idols. They have made kings and princes without God's command or consent.† False prophets have made their appearance.‡ They have made a snare for the true prophet.§ They have built fortresses and trusted to the multitude of their men.

The condition of Israel is even worse in this section than in the preceding. They have sowed the wind and are reaping the whirlwind. They are punished on every side. Judgment springs up like poppies. Their land yields them no sustenance. Should it so happen that somewhere a few blades of grain may grow, strangers stand ready to snatch it away. The "depredation" of the former section seems now to be carried to its fullest extent, and one is reminded of the effects of the locusts in Joel or of the condition of Israel under the Midian domination in the book of Judges.

But a still gloomier future awaits them. The prophet sees as it were an eagle flying against the chosen people, an im-

* It would seem that 10:12, in the form of a command, shows what Israel ought to do in order to bring out into stronger contrast what they actually did do as expressed in verse 13.

† This can hardly refer to all the kings of the Ten Tribes as some ruled by direct divine appointment, e. g., the first Jeroboam, and also the house of Jehu, to which the second Jeroboam belonged. We may have here an explanation of the omission, in the title of the book, of all the kings of Israel except Jeroboam. The writer, perhaps, would not formally recognize the succeeding kings as such by divine right.

‡ I offer this as an explanation of 9:7.

§ I would suggest the following as a free translation of 9:8. "A fowler's snare is in all the ways of Ephraim's God-appointed watcher, the prophet, and enmity towards him is found among the people of his God." Translating the verse thus and giving to the preceding verse the explanation suggested, we have an interesting picture of Israel's religious condition.

pending destruction hovering over them and even now swooping down upon them. As the section advances the nameless destruction takes form and shape. The nations are to be gathered against God's people. The eagle becomes Assyria. A great curse of barrenness is pronounced. There shall be no more births. Should they raise up any children these will be destroyed. Israel shall lead forth her own children to the slayer. The peculiar institutions of the northern kingdom are to be destroyed. The kings whom they have made without consulting God shall pass away like a chip upon the flood. The high places shall be destroyed, the pillars removed, and the altars broken down. Thorns and thistles shall overgrow the places of their licentious worship. The calves shall be carried off to the Assyrian amid the wailing of the people and the howling of the priests. The multitudes shall call upon the mountains and the hills to cover them. They shall no more dwell on the Lord's land. They shall become wanderers among the nations and there eat food unsanctified by offerings to Jehovah. The cities of a new Egypt shall be their gathering place while alive and their burying place when dead. Assyria shall be the land of their captivity.

Then away beyond all this the prophet looks and beholds a day of glad return. God shall roar like a lion and His people shall come like trembling birds from the West and from Assyria and from Egypt.

When was this section written? What was the standpoint of the writer? It would seem that one can hardly read this section without being impressed with the feeling that the prophet stands at the beginning of a great calamity which ends in the exile of the people. If this is the case the prophet must be speaking at the time of the approach of the Galilean captivity by Tiglath-Pileser, the beginning of those troubles which ended with the captivity of Samaria. (Or perhaps it was at the first approach of the Assyrian, not to help but to distress.) This would place the section not long after the preceding one. There the people were told that they would find a lion and a snare on the way to Assyria. Here the lion seizes, the net is sprung. The Assyrian comes, but

only to oppress and to carry off. This is just what we learn from the historical books was the result of their appeal to Assyria. This view would place this section late enough to allow for the making of kings without God's consent, as several kings had reigned since Jeroboam II., and will also explain the use of the word "Jareb," which in the former section seems to refer to Tiglath-Pileser. The calf here carried as a present to king Jareb would go to show that Tiglath-Pileser was still reigning. It is possible that the calf of Bethel was not carried off until some time after the Galilean captivity. If this was so, it could not have been given to Tiglath-Pileser, but when the prophet speaks he is still the king, and Hosea neglects or is ignorant of the fact that another king shall reign before the time of the carrying off. This view of the date of this section, of course, would seem to prevent a reference to Shalmaneser in "Shalman" 10: 14. If it is, two explanations of this section are possible. Either this section was written at different times, or the prophet, writing later, changes his mental standpoint from time to time.

We come now to the last section of the book, chapters 12-14.

This may be divided into three parts. The first, chapter 12, is sub-divided into two paragraphs, each closing with a reference to Jacob. The second, 13: 1-14: 1, is composed of a series of statements of sin and punishment. The third part expresses by a dialogue between God and the prophet (the people) the glad return. This is perhaps the least satisfactory section of the whole book.

We have a picture of Ephraim indulging in deceit and lies while Judah is still faithful to God. Again we are told of Ephraim coquetting with Assyria and Egypt, turning to the one and the other for alliances and help. They become worshippers of Baal and then proceed further to idolatry. The altars are as numerous as heaps of stone on the furrows. We are told of their being wealthy and boasting of the honesty by which it was gotten. Then we are told of the evil results of their Baal worship and again that the king and judges and princes are no more. God has been good to them, led them through the wilderness; but when they had plenty they

forgot Him who bestowed it all. The time has come for repentance but they fail to turn. We then have a picture of the punishment. God will return them to their tents and there instruct them by prophecy and vision as of old. God will tear and rend like a wild beast. An east wind shall dry up all the land. Samaria shall be captured, the women slain and the children dashed in pieces. The people shall pass away as the morning cloud, as the dew. They shall be scattered like chaff, and disappear as smoke from a chimney spreading through the atmosphere is dissipated and lost. The picture of the distant future is bright. The two great sins denounced by Hosea, idolatry and trusting to foreign nations, shall be forsaken. God will forgive and abundantly bless His people.

What is the date of this section? On the one side we have the statement that Israel was wicked and Judah was good, with references to a state of prosperity quite different from the condition of affairs of the two preceding sections. Nor is there very explicit reference to an exile such as is found in the preceding section. Gilead is also mentioned. All point to a time earlier than the central sections of the book. On the other hand, we have an account of the dickering with Assyria and Egypt which was done during the reign of King Hoshea, the destruction of the king and princes, and the sacking of Samaria. These would point to a date very near the taking of Samaria. The title of the book says, "The word of the Lord which was in the days of . . . Hezekiah." This section would seem to be the only one which could have been uttered during the reign of this king. Perhaps the best conclusion is that the view point of this section is the closing days of the northern kingdom. We have other accounts of this period in the historical books, but lacking the poetic beauty and vividness of the descriptions of Hosea, an eye-witness and a terribly interested participant in the events themselves.